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COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
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REVIEW OF SECTORAL CLUSTERS, FIRST PHASE: HEALTH, HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND FRESHWATER

Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

Human settlements

1. The Commission on Sustainable Development reviewed with appreciation the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.17/1994/5) and the background paper prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) on promoting sustainable human settlements development.

2. The Commission recognized, in the context of human settlements development, the importance of achieving sustainability and the goals of Agenda 21, 1/ particularly in view of the high rate of urbanization and the consequent challenge to the local and global environment, and also in view of the lack of shelter and sanitation for a large segment of the population in developing countries. While the urban development patterns in a number of countries, particularly in the developed countries, provided for a satisfactory standard of living for sizeable parts of the population, they also placed an extraordinary strain on the world's ecological resources and systems.

3. The Commission suggested that Governments take a balanced approach to all programme areas of chapter 7 and chapter 21. Land-resource management, urban transportation, access to adequate shelter, and the management of solid wastes, especially in developing countries, were identified as areas requiring greater attention. The Commission noted the close linkage between human settlements and the issues of water supply, sanitation and health.

1/ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

4. The Commission drew special attention to the potential contributions of the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), to be held in Istanbul in June 1996, and to the crucial role of UNCHS. That would be a key Conference, which was expected to support and further advance the objectives of Agenda 21.

5. The Commission drew attention to the linkages between unsatisfactory shelter and environmental conditions and the lack of access to land and security of tenure, on the one hand, and social divisions, violence and the degradation of personal safety, on the other. It was recognized that Governments at all levels should recognize that insecure and inhuman conditions for living and working both violated human rights and were a primary cause of social conflict and violent disruptions of civil society.

6. The Commission recognized that human settlements development needed to take a comprehensive approach that treated urban and rural problems as integral parts of the overall human settlements equation, since developing countries, in particular, faced rapid urban population growth due, inter alia, to increasing migration from rural to urban areas.

7. The Commission recommended that Governments and the international community give priority attention to human settlements programmes and policies to reduce urban pollution and to improve and expand urban services and infrastructure, particularly in low-income communities. Those efforts were seen as necessary to safeguarding human health, preserving the integrity of the natural environment and ensuring economic productivity. The "brown agenda" (a concept that addressed urban pollution resulting from inadequate water supply, sanitation and drainage, poor industrial and solid-waste management, and air pollution) was also highlighted as an umbrella approach to urban pollution issues that could be used to link and better implement Agenda 21 in the urban context.

8. The Commission took note of the relevant provisions of the Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, 2/ adopted by the international community at the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

9. The Commission underscored the crucial importance of action at the local level and confirmed the importance of the local Agenda 21 process, as specified in chapter 28 of Agenda 21. The participation of people at the local level, including major group representatives, to facilitate effective local action and efficient management of human settlements was indispensable. It was recognized that local authorities and their national and international associations were important partners for the decentralized implementation of appropriate human settlements programmes.

10. The Commission noted the financial and technical requirements needed to implement the human settlement activities set out in Agenda 21 and emphasized

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2/ Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 26 April-6 May 1994 (United Nations publication, forthcoming), resolution 1, annex II.

the substantial resource and technology gap faced by developing countries and economies in transition in addressing human settlements problems.

11. The Commission noted the great potential that existed within the human settlements context for increased economic activity, job creation and related revenues, inter alia, as a result of building construction programmes. It was noted that such positive potentials could be realized through appropriate sustainable human settlements policies that emphasized greater use of local materials and human resources, encouraging and supporting design efficiency and energy-saving methods, among other initiatives. In that context, the work-place and the role of workers could be an important focus for the implementation of policies and programmes.

12. The integral role of the private sector in the development and dissemination of cost-effective and sustainable building materials, increased energy and materials efficiency, and sustainable waste management, was underlined. In that context, the Commission particularly highlighted the need to encourage local, small and micro-enterprises.

13. The Commission emphasized the need to strengthen human settlements management capacity, where appropriate, as a necessary prerequisite for the successful implementation of all human settlements-related components of Agenda 21. Particular emphasis was also placed on building the capacity of relevant major groups to encourage and enhance their contributions to local, regional and international human settlements development efforts.

14. The Commission noted, in regard to solid-waste management, that the promotion of waste recycling and reuse provided a unique opportunity in waste management; it helped to solve the problem of environmental degradation and had the potential to alleviate urban poverty and generate income amongst the urban poor. That would, however, require supply-side policies aimed at promoting and supporting resource recovery, and demand-side policies aimed at stimulating markets for recovered materials and products.

15. The Commission recognized that many developing countries were dependent on imported technologies for infrastructure development and improvements, including for solid-waste management, and noted that the international community had an important role to play in facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technology. At the same time, full use should be made of locally available technologies that could be adapted to existing needs.

16. The Commission, therefore:

(a) Called on Governments to strengthen the networks of small- and medium-sized settlements in rural regions in order to provide attractive settlements opportunities and ease migratory pressure on large metropolises, and recommended that Governments implement programmes of rural development by expanding employment opportunities, providing educational and health facilities, strengthening technical infrastructure, and encouraging rural enterprises and sustainable agriculture, and further called upon the international community to support those rural development programmes;

(b) Recommended that Governments and the private sector, particularly in the developed countries, increase their efforts to develop new and environmentally sound technologies for urban transportation, other infrastructure and buildings, as well as environmentally sound products, in order to reduce demands on natural resources. Those technologies and products, as well as the information related to them should, where appropriate, be made accessible to urban and environmental authorities in all countries;

(c) Called upon Governments to strengthen the economic, political and social institutions of civil society so as to enhance, especially at the municipal level, the capacity of local authorities, training institutions, community groups and non-governmental organizations to act as effective partners and organizers of sustainable development activities at the local level. The Commission further invited local authorities and their associations to exchange know-how on the effective management of human settlements, including satisfactory coordination and burden-sharing among central city and suburban local authorities in urban agglomerations, and, as appropriate, in rural areas.

17. The Commission, further:

(a) Requested Governments, the international community, UNCHS, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to fully support the preparatory process for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), including at the regional level;

(b) Urged appropriate United Nations agencies, through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), to mobilize legal, economic and environmental expertise for the development of equitable and sustainable land use planning and management strategies for human settlements of all sizes;

(c) Called upon Governments and international organizations to emphasize "best practice" in delivery mechanisms, including demand-driven systems, increased networking, bottom-up capacity-building, demonstration/replication strategies, regional coordination and decentralized local management and, in that context, called for a review of "best practice" applications to provide a basis for the systematic dissemination of effective models;

(d) Invited the appropriate United Nations agencies and organizations, through IACSD, to launch a demonstration initiative for environmentally friendly urban transport. That initiative should draw together the best available expertise on urban infrastructure management and should facilitate the exchange of knowledge on "best practices" between developed and developing countries. The Secretary-General was invited to report to the Commission on progress in that area by 1997;

(e) Invited appropriate United Nations agencies and international organizations, through IACSD, to consider the feasibility of preparing and implementing integrated environment upgrading demonstration projects for human settlements in three mega-cities: one each from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Secretary-General was invited to report to the Commission on progress in that area by 1997;

(f) Called upon Governments and international agencies to support and encourage local, small and micro-enterprises, which, particularly in the context of local development, developed and offered environmentally sustainable building components and related products as well as environmentally sound energy systems;

(g) Urged Governments and international organizations to give more concerted attention to the management of solid wastes. That should include promoting greater awareness of the environmental and health risks from solid waste and the impact of changes in production and consumption patterns on the volume and type of such waste, as well as utilizing the resources and potential of the private sector, including the formal and informal sectors, and using indigenous technologies and techniques;

(h) Called upon appropriate United Nations agencies and international organizations, through IACSD, to establish joint programming mechanisms in the area of human settlements that were specifically focused on urban services and urban poverty and their linkages with health and the environment and urged donor organizations to support those joint programming initiatives;

(i) Urged the United Nations agencies and other international bodies to include in their urban monitoring and reporting activities appropriate indicators for the environmental performance of cities;

(j) Urged the international community, in carrying out its assistance activities, to explore, through appropriate authorities, the full range of joint programming options and new alliances with, inter alia, local authorities and associations of local authorities, national and international non-governmental organization, the private sector and women's and community groups;

(k) Requested the Secretary-General, in the context of reporting on section III of Agenda 21, to give special attention to the role of local authorities and to the progress they were making in the implementation of the human settlements objectives of Agenda 21;

(l) Invited the task manager to continue to monitor progress made by the United Nations and other international agencies in implementing chapter 7 of Agenda 21 and to inform the Commission periodically of such progress through IACSD;

(m) Called upon Governments and international organizations to focus greater attention on meeting the capital investment requirements of human settlements through enhanced resource mobilization strategies and policies that facilitate greater flows of private investment in infrastructure and services and all forms of public and private sector partnership in human settlements development;

(n) Urged Governments to mobilize financial and technological resources, as agreed in chapters 33 and 34 of Agenda 21, and in the relevant decisions of the Commission, to respond to the priorities contained in the decision.